

Madam Chair and members of the Committee.

My name is Susan Pesta, I live here in Helena, and am a 25 year employee of West Mont, the agency providing residential and vocational services for my disabled son. As a parent it is comforting to know your child is living and working in a safe environment, with staff that looking out for his best interests.

Your funding and support of DD programs has made a difference for the special needs population in Montana.

I am here today to explain why I support and encourage you to provide the additional funding, a rate increase recommended by the state consultants for agencies providing services to individuals with Developmental Disabilities.

The Governor proposes a 0% increase for DD providers. We are asking, at a minimum, the increase in funding being recommended by the Montana Association of Disability Services. Your past financial support of providers has made a difference by allowing us to increase wages, retain qualified staff, and keep up with other employee related expenses like workers comp., the rising costs of health insurance, and other benefits. We want to continue down this path.

Lastly, we know there is not an unlimited pot of money. Our agency is very committed to providing the best possible service to individuals with disabilities, like my son. The last twenty years West Mont has been developing alternative funding for our programs. We fundraise for additional dollars, and while our community is supportive, it does not offset the total dollars we will need to continue at the level we are now.

Thank you for your consideration.